

Truman Doctrine to Reagan Doctrine, the fatal flaws

By Daniel Schorr

FORTY years ago today, when President Truman addressed a joint session of Congress and announced that the United States would be the defender of democracy around the world, starting with Greece and Turkey, I was just starting out as a foreign correspondent in the Netherlands. Among the Dutch, the speech was greeted with some surprise. The language seemed strident: "It is the policy of the United States to give support to free people who are attempting to resist subjugation from armed minorities or from outside forces."

Holland, only beginning to pull itself out of Nazi occupation and devastation, did not perceive the Communists as a big problem. The Communist Party had never won more than 5 percent of the votes in an election. The Dutch worried less about invading hordes than food hoarding.

Later we learned how that speech had come to be. The Russians were perceived as mounting a threat to the Turkish straits and the Dardanelles. Truman's "wise men," like Dean Acheson and Averell Harriman, were warning him about falling dominoes. Britain, drained by World War II, was ready to withdraw its support from Turkey and the corrupt right-wing government of Greece. For Acheson and other hawks in the Truman administration, there was no doubt that the US had to pick up the baton being dropped by Britain, or Greece and Turkey would fall into Soviet hands and the lights would start going out all over Europe.

George Kennan provided the philosophical underpinning for the Truman Doctrine with his own concept called "containment," a concept he would come to regret because of the simplistic way in which it was applied.

So Truman's people came up with a \$400 million aid package for Greece and Turkey. Republican Sen. Arthur Vandenberg privately warned President Truman that the only way he would get Congress to go for it was to "make a speech and scare the hell out of the country."

President Truman drew a line between East and West, between freedom and tyranny, between communism and democracy. And if he didn't quite scare the hell out of the country, he scared some thinking people. His own secretary of state, George Marshall, thought there was too much flamboyant anticommunism in the speech. So did Europeans, in no mood for another war, not even a cold war.

Greece and Turkey were "saved," though there is a real question of how threatened they had been. But the US set off on a course from the domino of Greece and Turkey to the domino of Vietnam, from Bolsheviks to the "evil empire," from Truman Doctrine to Reagan Doctrine.

Looking back, one can trace that line. First, having asked Congress to get tough with Communists abroad, President Truman felt he had to get tough with Communists at home. So he ordered loyalty tests for government workers, contributing to the hysteria known as McCarthyism.

Next, to soften the harshness of the Truman Doctrine rhetoric and to deal with Europe's more urgent problems, the Marshall Plan was launched - a plan that Truman wisely decided to name for his secretary of state rather than himself. But the plan, visionary as it was, was still designed to exclude the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In June, the anniversary of the Marshall Plan, it will be interesting to reflect how different a world this might be if the Marshall Plan had been used to unite rather than divide Europe.

Europeans were a little cynical about the single-minded American view of the communist "menace." The Marshall Plan was sold to a doubting Congress as the only way to save Italy from going red in a pending election. So money went where communism seemed to threaten. French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France said, "We must keep up this indispensable communist scare." A story went around that the Principality of Monaco, which couldn't find a single Communist, asked the French if it could borrow some in order to get US aid, but was told, "Sorry, we need every one we have!"

By 1949 the Russians had nuclear weapons and by 1950 the United States had started a new military buildup with the doctrine of "flexible response," committing America to defend freedom everywhere against "the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin . . . the slave state."

"Flexible response," son of the Truman Doctrine, was embodied in a document called NSC-68 (for National Security Council). It was based, Henry Kissinger has written, on "a flawed premise that we were weaker than the Soviets [when] in fact we were stronger than they were." That inordinate fear of a massive Communist conspiracy became in turn the father of "missile gap" (John Kennedy) and "window of vulnerability" (Ronald Reagan). It also made it impossible to see and exploit the deepening ideological split between the Soviet Union and China.

In 1955, West Germany's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer went to Moscow to meet Soviet party Chief Nikita Khrushchev, and came back saying that Khrushchev had talked to him about "the yellow peril."

In 1957, when I interviewed Khrushchev on a CBS panel in the Kremlin, the Soviet press printed the full text of the interview - except for my question about ideological differences with China, too sensitive an issue then for the Soviet press. But in Washington, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles still saw only "international Communism," and, years later, some in the US government still considered the Soviet-Chinese split as just a KGB disinformation trick.

In Korea, a miscalculation was made that drew China into the war. And in Vietnam, an untold series of miscalculations was made. As Acheson preached domino theory in Europe, Lyndon Johnson preached domino theory in Asia. But in Asia the Communists were not contained. President Nixon's "secret plan" to get the Russians to call off Ho Chi Minh did not work, and that domino fell.

So now the Reagan Doctrine, the grandson of the Truman Doctrine. If the Truman Doctrine was meant to hold back the Communists, the Reagan doctrine was meant to roll them back. If the Truman Doctrine relied on money and metal to support friendly governments, the Reagan Doctrine was more inclined to use cloak and dagger to undermine unfriendly regimes. The idea of intervention was carefully developed in rhetoric even as covert-action schemes were being plotted at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., and

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deep inside the National Security Council.

At Notre Dame, in 1981, President Reagan said that, to spread freedom, "we must be prepared to respond to opportunities as they arise and to create opportunities where they have not existed before." In a speech in the British Parliament in 1982 that George Will helped to write, the President spoke of "taking actions to assist the campaign for democracy." In February 1983 he spoke of America "in the vanguard of this movement" to foster democracy.

And, finally, with the second inaugural in 1985, the concept of aiding everywhere, from Nicaragua to Afghanistan, those denoted as "freedom fighters" emerged full blown. The phrases were "human freedom on the march.... America its staunchest friend.... We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives on every continent." And, as a pseudo-legal underpinning for what was happening and what was to come, "Support for freedom fighters is self-defense and totally consistent with the charters of the Organization of American States and the United Nations."

In his London speech, the President had alluded to a plan called "Project Democracy." In its open form, it was a plan to sell democratic ideas around the world, and that plan eventually emerged from Congress as the National Endowment for Democracy. "Our support for democracy should not be hidden," Secretary of State George Shultz has stated.

But President Reagan wanted to use Project Democracy for a large-scale program of covert action and, turned down by Congress, he set up his own Project Democracy inside the National Security Council, headed by that "national hero," Lt. Col. Oliver North.

Room 302 in the Executive Office Building was the headquarters, and Room 208 the situation room, for worldwide

covert-action projects in support of freedom fighters. The center coordinated money-raising and arms deliveries for the contras in Nicaragua. It rode herd over the invasion of Grenada. It was in charge of aiding the resistance in Afghanistan and Angola and Cambodia. It coordinated the air attack on Libya, and it fooled around with a plan for an American-Egyptian invasion of Libya. When a new covert-

action plan was proposed, Colonel North might say, "We'll get one of our Project Democracy companies to pay for it."

"Project Democracy companies?" What were those? Money was collected from private sources and foreign governments and skimmed off the Iranian arms sales for hidden bank accounts and front companies. Project Democracy in the National Security Council, which also managed to blacken the name of the respectable Endowment for Democracy, functioned like something between a CIA covert directorate and the Mafia.

And all this in the name of burnishing the image of democracy for the third world and the communist world!

Curiously, back in February 1983, the Soviet government made a statement through the Tass news agency saying that, under the "pretext" of safeguarding democracy, a "special coordinating center" had been set up, headed by an assistant to the President, to carry out secret operations aimed at destabilizing unfriendly governments. No one paid much attention to that statement then. It now appears that, through espionage or other means, the Soviets had laid their hands on a presidential directive, NSDD 77, the charter for covert action.

So there you have 40 years of history: The Truman Doctrine was made by the "wise men," which led to the Vietnam war, made by the best and the brightest, which led to the Reagan Doctrine, made by cowboys with computers to fulfill the Rambo visions of those in the White House. If the country has survived these four decades, it can survive anything.

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